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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT AZIZ ON MAURITANIAN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador met with President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz on September 8 ostensibly to deliver President Obama's invitation for a luncheon with sub-Saharan Heads of State on the margins of UNGA (SEPTTEL) and to deliver REFTEL demarche on the eve of the Arab League summit. Ambassador expanded on the REFTEL request for concrete actions by Arab states in support of the Middle East peace process in order to broach the question of Mauritania's frozen relations with Israel. The Ambassador told Aziz we understood the Israelis were urgently looking for indications of whether Aziz planned to restart the relationship or not -- understanding this might not happen immediately. The Ambassador indicated there was some discussion in Israel of withdrawing their remaining personnel (housed at the Israeli residence) and simply abandoning the physical presence.

¶2. (C) President Aziz told the Ambassador that the presence of the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott had always been polemic for Mauritania. He noted that the first Al Qaeda action in Mauritania was the 2008 attack against the embassy (Comment: Seeming to suggest that the increase in AQIM activities in Mauritania had at least started as a response to the relations with Israel. End Comment). The fact that Mauritania was isolated in the region in having relations with Israel has been a source of constant and strong pressure from neighboring states. Mauritanian public opinion remained strongly "90 to 95%" opposed to the relationship.

¶3. (C) President Aziz said "the relationship has to be justified (to the population and neighbors) by actions." The constant escalation of violence in the region including incursions into Gaza had made the Mauritanian position harder and harder to support on a political front. Material benefits from the relationship were limited to the refurbishment of a hospital -- insufficient to counter the political costs of the relationship. Aziz noted, "we are open to a continued relationship, but the Israelis have to help us justify it." He stressed he was "not talking about money" but political actions. He added, "I know that the Palestinians also need to do a lot too." Drawing on the fact that relations are "frozen" and not broken, Aziz noted "there is more to a relationship than a building and a flag pole."

¶4. (C) Comment: President Aziz' comments indicate he is comfortable with the status quo -- neither returning to a quasi-normal relationship with Israel nor actually breaking relationships. While making no substantive comments, he responded "yes" to the main points of REFTEL calling on all parties to work towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians and normal full relations between Arab states and Israel. He reinforced "we have no problem with Israel" but made clear his domestic and regional political calculations do not justify "unfreezing" relations quite yet. We believe Mauritania may follow the lead of other Arab

states if they have a rapprochement with the Israelis, but
Aziz will not get out in front on this issue. End Comment.
BOULWARE